

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks on Signing an Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices To Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety
May 25, 2022

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. Please have a seat. Good afternoon.

President Joe Biden, members of our Cabinet, Members of Congress, community leaders, law enforcement officials: It's good to be here with all of you—not under these circumstances, but it is good to be with you.

And I know, of course, that today, following yesterday, that all of our hearts, of course, are with the people of Uvalde, Texas; with the parents, with the children; with all the folks who said goodbye yesterday morning to someone they loved, not knowing that that goodbye would be their last.

Enough is enough. Enough is enough. As the President said last night, we must have the courage to stand up to the gun lobby and pass reasonable gun safety laws. We must work together to create an America where everyone feels safe in their community, where children feel safe in their schools. And of course, that responsibility that we collectively have to ensure that all people feel safe in their community is what brings us together today.

It is an honor to be joined by the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others. And I've met many of you before and many times, and many others I'm meeting for the first time.

I'm moved, as always, by your courage. You have felt so much pain, and you have endured unimaginable grief. You have experienced the anguish of losing someone you love and cherish. And yet you are here, as you have been throughout the days of your grief, standing selflessly, full of grace and resilience, to speak up, to speak out, often against odds—great odds—to fight for a world where no one has to experience what you have been through.

Your loved ones should be with us today. You should not have to mourn. You should never have had to mourn in order for our Nation to feel your pain and to understand what is wrong and to agree that something must be done.

I know it is a particularly difficult day for the Floyd family. Two years ago today, a brother, a son, a father was taken from you. We will never forget what happened that day. The eyes of the world, literally, were on what happened that day. And collectively, we remain horrified by what we witnessed. And we are here today, in memory of George Floyd and all those we have lost, to take action.

The law enforcement officers of our Nation, well, they swear an oath to protect and to serve, and the vast majority do so honorably. Yet we know, too often, when there is a use of biased policing and excessive force—when that occurs—it too often is not met with accountability, denying equal justice not just to individuals, but to whole communities and, therefore, to our Nation as a whole.

Trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve is critical to ensuring public safety. And as many of you know, this is an issue I have worked on personally since my first days as an elected district attorney and as California's attorney general. As a United States Senator, I,

together with Senator Cory Book [Booker],* Congresswoman Karen Bass, introduced legislation to advance much-needed reforms. That legislation would have ensured greater transparency and increased accountability.

We later named it the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. And it was passed, because of the strength of the leadership in the House of Representatives, through the House of Representatives.

However, last fall, Senate Republicans rejected the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. They walked away from their moral obligation to address what caused millions of Americans to march in the streets: the critical need that a coalition of Americans were demanding, were pleading for, in terms of reform and accountability.

At the time, President Joe Biden and I, and all of us here, we made clear and we vowed that we would explore every action available to us at the executive level to advance the cause of justice in our Nation.

In a moment, our President will sign an Executive order that takes dozens of important actions to advance effective, accountable policing; to strengthen trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve; and to help us fight crime and promote public safety.

This order will help protect our communities, and it will help keep members of law enforcement safe on the job.

These actions are a result of input and collaboration from a broad set of partners, many of whom are here today: civil rights leaders; Members of Congress, in particular members of the Congressional Black Caucus—and I see Madam Chair here with us today; leading law enforcement groups; and of course, the families of the victims.

We know this Executive order will not take away your pain—your pain—and the pain of all those families who may not be in this room right now.

We also know this Executive order is no substitute for legislation nor does it accomplish everything we know must be done. But it is a necessary and long-overdue, critical step forward.

And once again, the President and I call on the United States Senate to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. And once again, we vow that we will do everything in our power to protect public safety, to support law enforcement, and to address this issue of racial injustice wherever it exists.

And with that, it is now my great honor to introduce a man who, when he ran for President, was clear in his purpose, which was to bring our Nation together, who fights every day to make sure all our communities are safe and that the rights of all people are protected. The President of the United States, Joe Biden.

The President. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Please.

Thank you all. Vice President Harris.

Shooting in Uvalde, Texas

Before we begin, let me say a few words about what happened in Uvalde, Texas, elementary school.

Since I spoke last night, the confirmed death toll has tragically climbed, including another teacher and two more—three more students.

* White House correction.

Jill and I will be traveling to Texas in the coming days to meet with the families and let them know we have a sense—just a sense of their pain, and hopefully, bring some little comfort to the community in shock, in grief, and in trauma. As a nation, I think we all must be there for them. Everyone.

And we must ask: When in God's name will we do what needs to be done to, if not completely stop, fundamentally change the amount of the carnage that goes on in this country? To state the obvious, like Cory and a lot of other people here, I'm sick and tired—I'm just sick and tired—of what's going on and continues to go on.

I spent my career, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and as Vice President, working for commonsense gun reforms—as I said, as a Senator and a Vice President.

While they clearly will not prevent every tragedy, we know certain ones will have significant impact and have no negative impact on the Second Amendment. The Second Amendment is not absolute. When it was passed, you couldn't own a cannon, you couldn't own certain kinds of weapons. It's just—there's always been limitations.

But guess what? These actions we've taken before, they saved lives. And they can do it again.

The idea that an 18-year-old can walk into a store and buy weapons of war, designed and marketed to kill, is, I think, just wrong. It just violates common sense. Even the manufacturer—the inventor of that weapon thought that as well.

You know, where is the backbone? Where is the courage to stand up to a very powerful lobby?

But here is one modest step: The Federal agency that measures and ensures that gun laws are enforced and the Second Amendment is abided by—the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the AFT [ATF]*—has not had a Senate confirmation leader for 7 years because of these disputes. For 7 years, they've been out—without anyone in charge.

I nominated a supremely qualified former prosecutor who has broad bipartisan support from law enforcement and the community overall. His hearing was held easier today—earlier today, I should say. The Senate should confirm him without delay, without excuse. Send the nomination to my desk. It's time for action.

Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices To Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety

We're here today for the same purpose: to come together and say, "Enough"; to act. We must. Vice President Harris and members of the Cabinet; Members of the Congress; civil rights leaders; law enforcement officers and officials; distinguished guests, especially the families missing a piece of their soul, including the family sitting in front of me and the beautiful young girl who told me, "My daddy is going to change history." And he will, honey. He will. They've lost a piece of their soul 2 years ago as well.

You know, I know events remembering your loved ones, even though they're meant with great reverence, are really hard. Everything is coming back as if it was—happened yesterday.

But in your own ways, you've each—each of you whose family has been victimized have summoned the courage to find purpose through your pain, to stir justice that's been too long dormant, and to give hope while in need of hope yourself.

* White House correction.

That's why the Executive order I'll be signing today is so important, in my view. It's a measure of what we can do together to heal the very soul of this Nation; to address profound fear and trauma, exhaustion that particularly Black Americans have experienced for generations; and to channel that private pain and public outrage into a rare mark of progress for years to come.

Two summers ago, in the middle of a pandemic, we saw protests across the Nation the likes of which you hadn't seen since the 1960s. They unified people of every race and generation. Athletes and sports leagues boycotted and postponed games. Companies and workers proclaimed "Black Lives Matter." Students staged solidarity walkouts. From Europe to the Middle East to Asia to Australia, people saw their own fight for justice and equality in what we were trying to do. The message is clear: Enough! Just, "Enough."

And look, almost—almost a year later—[*applause*]*—no.* Almost a year later, a jury in Minnesota stepped up and they found a police officer guilty of murdering George Floyd, with officers and even a police chief taking the stand to testify against misconduct of their colleagues. I don't know any good cop who likes a bad cop.

But for many people, including many families here, such accountability is all too rare. That's why I promised as President I would do everything in my power to enact meaningful police reform that is real and lasting.

That's why I called on Congress to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act—[*applause*]*—to send it to my desk.*

Some asked why I haven't done this Executive order earlier. If I'd done it, I was worried it would undercut the effort to get the law passed.

This is a call to action based on a basic truth: Public trust, as any cop will tell you, is the foundation of public safety. If they're not trusted, the population doesn't contribute, doesn't cooperate.

Two sides of the same—coin, inextricably linked. And the principles of fairness and equal justice are at the core of each of them.

For the wheels of justice are propelled by the confidence that people have in their system of justice. Without that confidence, crimes would go unreported. Witness fears come—don't—fear to come forward; cases go unsolved; victims suffer in isolation while perpetrators remain free; and ironically, police are put in greater danger; justice goes undelivered.

Without public trust, law enforcement can't do its job of serving and protecting all of our communities. But as we've seen all too often, public trust is frayed and broken, and that undermines public safety.

The families here today and across the country have had to ask why this Nation—why so many Black Americans wake up knowing they could lose their life in the course of just living their life today: simply jogging, shopping, sleeping at home. Whether they made headlines or not, lost souls gone too soon.

Members of Congress, including many here today—like Senator Cory Booker and Congressman [Congresswoman]* Karen Bass, alongside members of the Congressional Black Caucus, House and Senate Judiciary Committees—spent countless hours on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act to find a better answer to that question. I sincerely thank you all for your tireless efforts. But they're not over.

* White House correction.

The House passed a strong bill. It failed in the Senate where our Republican colleagues opposed any meaningful reform. So we got to work on this Executive order, which is grounded in key elements of the Justice in Policing Act and reflects inputs of a broad coalition represented here today.

Families courageously shared their perspectives on what happened to their loved ones and what we could do to make sure it doesn't happen to somebody else. Civil rights groups and their leaders of every generation who have given their heart and soul to this work provided critical insights and perspectives.

The Executive order also benefits from the valuable inputs of law enforcement who put their lines on the—lives on the line every single day to serve.

Now, let me say there are those who seek to drive a wedge between law enforcement and the people they serve; those who peddle the fiction that public trust and public safety are in opposition to one another.

We know that's not true, but it occurs. I believe the vast majority of Americans want the same thing: trust, safety, and accountability.

The vast majority of law enforcement risk their lives every day to do the right thing. Their families wait for that phone call every time they put on that shield.

Just yesterday in Uvalde, brave local officers and Border Patrol agents intervened to save as many children as they could.

Here today I want to especially thank the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Fraternal Order of Police, as well as the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives—[*applause*]^{*}—the Federal Law Enforcement [Officers]^{*} Association, the Police Executive Research Forum, Major City Chiefs Association, and others who stepped up—stepped up—and endorsed what we're talking about today.

As divided as this Nation can feel, today we're showing the strength of our unity. It matters.

This Executive order is going to deliver the most significant police reform in decades. It applies directly, under law, to only 100,000 Federal law enforcement officers—all the Federal law enforcement officers. And though Federal incentives and best practices they're attached to, we expect the order to have significant impact on State and local law enforcement agencies as well.

Here are the key parts. First, the Executive order promotes accountability. It creates a new national law enforcement accountability database to track records of misconduct so that an officer can't hide the misconduct.

It strengthens the pattern-and-practice investigations to address systematic [systemic]^{*} misconduct in some departments. It mandates all Federal agents wear and activate body cameras while on patrol.

Second, the Executive order raises standards, bans chokeholds, restricts no-knock warrants, tightens use-of-force policies to emphasize deescalation and the duty to intervene to stop another officer from using executive [excessive]^{*} force, just as occurred—that didn't occur, but people testified it didn't occur in George Floyd's case.

And third, the Executive order modernizes policing. It calls for a fresh approach to recruit, train, promote, and retain law enforcement that tied to advancing public safety and public trust.

^{*} White House correction.

Right now we don't systematically collect data, for instance, on instances of police use of force. This Executive order is going to improve that data collection.

There's a lot more as well. The bottom line of the Executive order includes reforms that have long been talked about, but we're finally implementing at a Federal level. And it comes at a critical time.

By building trust, we can strengthen public safety, and we can more effectively fight crime in our communities. And we can do one more thing: We can show what's possible when we work together.

Look, I know—I know—progress can be slow and frustrating. And there's a concern that the reckoning on race inspired 2 years ago is beginning to fade. But acting today, we're showing that our dear friend, the late John Lewis—Congressman—wrote in his final words after his final march for justice in July of 2020. He said: "Democracy is not a state. It is an act." Democracy is not a state, it's an act—an affirmative act. And today we're acting.

We're showing that speaking out matters, being engaged matters, and that the work of our time—healing the soul of this Nation—is ongoing and unfinished and requires all of us never to give up, always to keep the faith.

I'll close with this: Over 2 years now—for over 2 years—we've gotten to know one another and pray with one another—not figuratively, literally. I promise the Floyd family, among others, that George's name is not just going to be a hashtag. Your daddy's name is going to be known for a long time. And that as a nation, we're going to ensure his legacy and the legacy of so many others remembered today, it's not about their death, but what we do in their memory that matters. The purpose.

In just a few moments, I'm going to deliver on that promise when I sign the Executive order. And Kamala and I will continue, along with our friends in Congress, to get meaningful police reform legislation on my desk as best we can, as quickly as we can, beyond what we're doing here, affecting States as well, directly.

On this day, we're showing the America we know. We're a great Nation because the vast majority of us are good people. And there's nothing beyond our capacity—nothing—when we act together as the United States of America.

And this is a start—a new start. May God bless you all, and may God protect our forces.

And now I'm going to go sign that Executive order. Thank you.

I'm about to sign "Advancing Executive Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety."

And since I only have one pen, you all are going to get a copy of this pen. *[Laughter]* I don't have to do one stroke at a time with each pen. *[Laughter]*

[At this point, the President signed the Executive order.]

God willing—*[inaudible]*.

[Gianna Floyd, daughter of the late George Floyd, came to the stage and sat at the signing desk.]

You know what she told me when I saw her when she was a little girl 2 years ago? Seriously, she pulled me aside and she said, "My daddy is going to change the world."

Thank you, everyone. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:14 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Steven M. Dettelbach, the President's nominee to be Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; former Minneapolis, MN, Police Ofc. Derek Chauvin, who was convicted April 20, 2021, for the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020; and Minneapolis Police Department Lt. Richard Zimmerman, retired Sgt. David Pleoger, and Police Chief Medaria Arradondo, and Minneapolis Park Police Ofc. Peter Chang, who testified in the trial of Mr. Chauvin. He also referred to H.R. 1280. Vice President Harris referred to Rep. Joyce Beatty, in her capacity as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Policing and criminal justice practices, efforts to enhance public trust and public safety and advance accountability, signing the Executive order.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Arradondo, Medaria; Bass, Karen R.; Biden, Jill T.; Booker, Cory A.; Chang, Peter; Chauvin, Derek; Dettelbach, Steven M. ; Floyd, Gianna; Harris, Kamala D.; Pleoger, David; Ramos, Salvador Rolando; Zimmerman, Richard.

Subjects: Civil rights : Firearm rights; Civil rights : Minorities :: Racial profiling; Civil rights : Racial equality; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Justice, Department of : Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; Law enforcement and crime : Community-oriented policing, strengthening efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Criminal justice system, reform efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Gun violence, prevention efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Law enforcement officers, service and dedication; Law enforcement and crime : Policing best practices, improvement efforts; Legislation, proposed : George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021; Texas : Uvalde :: Shooting; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD202200453.